

Message Text

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ACTION IO-13

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 OMB-01 /077 W

----- 097621

R 240750Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5515

INFO USIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6016

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PORG, PROP

SUBJ: "NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL" CONFERENCE

SUMMARY: TOP OFFICIALS OF THE MEA AND MOI HAVE SPOKEN OF A CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS AND HEADS OF NEWS AGENCIES TO BE HELD IN NEW DELHI IN JULY TO PREPARE "A CONSTITUTION" FOR A NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL FOR CONSIDERATION AT COLOMBO, BUT PLANS FOR THE MEETING APPEAR VAGUE, AND INDIAN JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING THE GENERAL MANAGER OF SAMACHAR, THE NEW INDIAN NATIONAL NEWS SERVICE, AND POSSIBLY SANJAY GANDHI ARE REPORTED TO BE OPPOSED TO SUCH A PLAN.

1. SOURCES IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS HAVE

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RECENTLY SPOKE OF A MEETING OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES TO

BE HAND IN NEW DELHI IN JULY FOR THE PURPOSE OF DRAWING UP PLANS FOR A "NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL," FOLLOWING UP PROPOSALS AT THE NON-ALIGNED MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN LIMA LAST SEPTEMBER AND THE MARCH MEETING IN TUNIS. ANSWERING A QUESTION IN THE LOK SABHA ON APRIL 15, DEPUTY MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS BIPINPAL DAS SAID THAT THE NEWS POOL IDEA WOULD BE GIVEN SHAPE AT THE NEW DELHI MEETING: "WE HAVE PREPARED A DRAFT AGENDA AND DRAFT CONSTITUTION AND CIRCULATED IT."

2. THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED ON APRIL 16 AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE VISIT TO NEW DELHI OF THE YUGOSLAV FOREIGN SECRETARY, MILO MINIC, DECLARED THAT "BOTH SIDES WELCOMED THE FORTHCOMING CONFERENCE OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL AS WELL AS HEADS OF PRESS AGENCIES OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES ON A 'NON-ALIGNED NEWS AGENCY POOL' TO BE HELD IN NEW DELHI IN JULY, 1976..." SAMACHAR, THE SINGLE NATIONAL INDIAN NEWS AGENCY CREATED EARLIER THIS YEAR BY THE "VOLUNTARY" AMALGAMATION OF FOUR EXISTING WIRE SERVICES (TWO ENGLISH-LANGUAGE AND TWO HINDI), REPORTED ON APRIL 17 THAT "INDIA IS NOW IN ACTIVE CONSULTATION WITH ALL OTHER NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES REGARDING THE AGENDA AND OTHER DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED CONFERENCE TO BE HELD HERE IN THE BEGINNING OF JULY ON A NON-ALIGNED NEWS AGENCIES POOL, ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES." IN A STORY WRITTEN ON THE SAME DAY, A CORRESPONDENT OF THE HINDUSTAN TIMES SAID THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF 82 NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES AND 30 NATIONAL NEWS AGENCIES OF THESE COUNTRIES WERE BEING INVITED TO THE NEW DELHI CONFERENCE.

3. EARLY IN MARCH, AT THE CONCLUSION OF AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO NEW DELHI BY THE YUGOSLAV SECRETARY FOR INFORMATION, MUHAMED BERBEROVIC, THE PRESS REPORTED THAT HE AND HIS INDIAN COUNTERPART, MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING V.C. SHUKLA, HAD "AGREED THAT THE PROPOSAL (FOR A NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL) EVOLVED AT THE CONFERENCE BEING HOSTED BY INDIA IN JULY SHOULD BE PLACED BEFORE THE NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST IN COLOMBO."

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4. ACCORDING TO WILFRED LAZARUS, A FORMER CHIEF EDITOR OF PRESS TRUST OF INDIA (NOW MERGED WITH THREE OTHER AGENCIES) WHO WAS NAMED ACTING GENERAL MANAGER OF SAMACHAR AT THE BEGINNING OF APRIL, THE MOST ACTIVE NATIONAL PROPONENT OF THE "NON-ALIGNED POOL" HAS BEEN YUGOSLAVIA, AND SUPPORT FOR THE IDEA IN INDIA HAS COME LARGELY FROM THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BUREAUCRATS IN THAT MINISTRY. INDIAN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS REGARD THE PROPOSAL AS UNWORKABLE,

UNDESIRABLE AND NOT IN INDIA'S INTEREST.

5. LAZARUS TOLD AND EMBOFF ON APRIL 22 THAT THE YUGOSLAVS WERE AWARE, FROM DISCUSSIONS HE AND OTHERS HAD HELD WITH THEIR INFORMATION OFFICIALS LAST MONTH, THAT INDIAN PROFESSIONALS DID NOT SHARE THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE GOI FOR THIS PROPOSAL. FOR THAT REASON, HE SAID, IT WAS THE YUGOSLAVS WHO HAD WISHED TO MOVE FINAL CONSIDERATION OF THE PLAN TO THE COLOMBO CONFERENCE AND TO CHARACTER TO THE NEW DELHI MEETING AS PREPARATORY ONLY. HE SAID YUGOSLAVIA HAD PROPOSED THAT BELGRADE BE SELECTED AS THE CENTRAL COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION POINT FOR A NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL; LAZARUS SAID HE HAD COUNTERED WITH PROPOSAL THAT FOUR CAPITALS--BELGRADE, NEW DELHI, CAIRO AND HAVANA--BE MAJOR REGIONAL POINTS IN THE NETWORK. HIS INTENTION WAS TO THROW A NEGOTIATING MONKEY-WRENCH INTO THE WORKS AND CONFOUND THE ENTIRE CONCEPT.

6. LAZARUS'S OPPOSITION TO THE NON-ALIGNED POOL IDEA SEEMED TO STEM LARGELY FROM TWO CONSIDERATIONS: HIS JUDGMENT THAT THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROFESSIONAL LEVEL OF MOST NATIONAL NEWS GATHERING AGENCIES IN THE NON-ALIGNED WORLD WOULD NOT SUPPORT SUCH AN AMBITIOUS UNDERTAKING; AND HIS VIEW THAT INDIA'S INTERESTS (BOTH NATIONAL INTERESTS AND READER INTERESTS) WOULD NOT BE SERVED BY ATTEMPTING TO POOL ON AN EQUAL BASIS THE KINDS OF INFORMATION EACH NATION SOUGHT ABOUT ALL OTHERS OR SOUGHT TO CONVEY IN ITS OWN BEHALF. HE IMPLIED THAT HE THOUGHT INDIA SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON STRENGTHENING ITS OWN NEWLY-ESTABLISHED NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY. HE SAID HE HAD EXPRESSED THESE VIEWS TO SANJAY GANDHI, WHO, HE INTIMATED, WAS ALSO NOT INCLINED TO WELCOME THE NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL. (WE KNOW FROM OTHER SOURCES THAT LAZARUS AS SANJAY'S PERSONAL CHOICE TO RUN SAMACHAR AND HAS "UNUSUAL" CONFIDENTIAL

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ACCESS TO DECISION-MAKING LEVELS AROUND THE PM.)

7. LAZARUS'S PROBLEMS AS ACTING GENERAL MANAGER OF SAMACHAR--LEGAL QUESTIONS IN DISSOLVING THE EXISTING AGENCIES, TWO OF THEM HEAVILY IN DEBT, AND PRESSURING FROM INFORMATION MINISTER SHUKLA TO "GET ON WITH IT"--WOULD, HE INDICATED, TAX HIS IMAGINATION AND RESOURCEFULNESS SUFFICIENTLY, AND HE WAS CLEARLY NOT EAGER TO TACKLE THE MATTER OF INDIAN PARTICIPATION IN A NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL VENTURE. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW PUBLIC GOI ENDORSEMENT FOR "PRESS POOL" AND LAZARUS'S (AND POSSIBLY SANJAY'S) PRIVATE EFFORTS TO SCUTTLE CONCEPT WILL FIND SOME POLICY LEVEL IN COMING MONTHS. SAXBE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NONALIGNED NATIONS, INFORMATION MEDIA, MINISTERIAL MEETINGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NEWDE06016
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760156-1172
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760426/aaaaavpq.tel
Line Count: 168
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION IO
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 MAY 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <13 SEP 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: "NON-ALIGNED NEWS POOL" CONFERENCE SUMMARY: TOP OFFICIALS OF THE MEA AND MOI HAVE SPOKEN
TAGS: PORG, PROP, IN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006